

## FACTORS PREDICTING 8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE HUNGARIAN STUDENTS' READING SKILLS IN ENGLISH AND IN GERMAN

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Students' proficiency in foreign languages has been of interest both to educational researchers and the public for decades. In Hungary, the two most frequently chosen second languages are English and German, and previous studies consistently documented higher achievements in English than in German at various stages in public schools. The present study aims to examine how earlier achievements in various academic areas and some other factors predict students' reading skills in English and German measured at the end of primary school. A representative sample of around 5,000 students was drawn for the Hungarian Educational Longitudinal Program when they entered school and data about their development (including reading in mother tongue, mathematics, inductive reasoning, socioeconomic status, etc.) were collected by means of several tests and questionnaires throughout their school career until the end of their primary education. At 8th grade, participants' reading skills were assessed in their first foreign language, English or German, respectively. Test results are available for more than 2,000 learners of English and more than 1,000 students of German.

As for the foreign language measuring instruments, the English and German reading tests were based on the same framework and the test items were constructed in the same way; therefore, the tests share the same structure and content. Correlation coefficients were computed between earlier achievements and later foreign language performance; partial correlations were computed controlled for mothers' education to estimate the effects not mediated by students' family background.

Findings of the study reconfirm what was found in previous research. (1) Relationships between most variables and foreign language reading achievements tend to be higher for learners of English than for their peers learning German; for example, second grade L1 reading achievements correlated at .443 with English reading at grade 8, whereas at .346 with German reading. (2) The difference between the correlations remained large when mothers' education was controlled (.379 and .265). (3) A larger impact of inductive reasoning was observed for English than for German. (4) Relationships between reading scores in L1 and L2 weaken over the years in both languages. (5) In some cases correlations were almost the same for the two languages; for example, .423 and .422 between 8th grade science literacy and English and German, respectively. The overall results show slightly different learning paths for the learners of the two target languages, thus providing scientific evidence that a complex interaction between individual differences, literacy in L1, and linguistic features of the target languages, as well as, most probably, methodological issues interact in a dynamic system.